

# B·A·C·K·G·A·M·M·O·N

THE CLASSIC BOARD GAME



EmuMovies

ATARI ST

ATARI MINDGAMES  
**BACKGAMMON**

*Player's Guide Notes*

For Atari 520, 1040 and MEGA Computers  
Monochrome or Colour Operation



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## Introduction

Backgammon (in one form or another) is the precursor of practically every modern board-and-pieces game in which the moves are decided by dice, even parlour games like Snakes and Ladders or the more sophisticated Monopoly.

Boards and pieces for a dice game that must have been very similar to modern Backgammon have been found on sites of the early Mesopotamian civilizations, which were 3000 years before Rome. Evidence of its presence (though none of its invention) has been found among the relics of most old civilizations – including the Chinese, Indian, Aztec, American Indian, Celtic, and Saxon.

In fact, Backgammon in some form is probably the oldest of all games combining skill and chance, although the element of skill lies mainly in the use of one's knowledge of the possible combinations that can be thrown with a pair of dice.

## Loading Instructions

To run the Backgammon program insert the Program Disk into drive A and switch on the computer. Double-click on the GAMMON.PRГ icon to run the program.

If you have a hard disk drive, you may optionally install the Backgammon program onto the drive by creating a suitably named folder and copying both the GAMMON.PRГ and GAMMON.RSC files into the folder. To run the program from hard disk, enter the folder and double-click on the GAMMON.PRГ program icon.

## The Board and its Arrangement

Backgammon is a game for two players, who use a rectangular board divided into two halves by a "Bar". One half of the board is called the "Outer table" and the other half the "Inner table". The following diagram illustrates the arrangement of the Backgammon board set up ready for a new game.

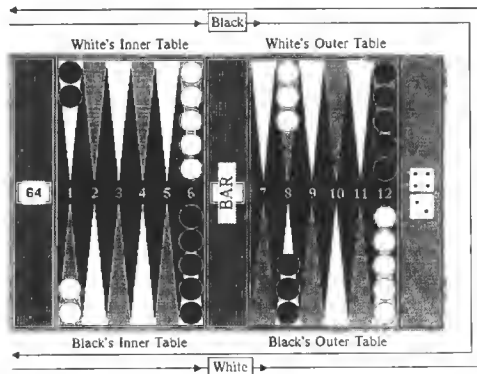


Figure 1 – Initial Setup and Direction of Play

As indicated by the arrows, each player moves his men around the board in the direction of his own inner table.

## The Start of Play

The players normally each roll one die to determine who starts. The player who rolls the higher number makes the first move, using the two numbers rolled by himself and his opponent. (If both players roll the same number, they must roll again. It is therefore impossible for the very first roll played in a game to be a double).

Once a game has begun, the players take turns to move. On each move other than the first, the player whose turn it is throws both dice himself.

## Making Ordinary Moves

If a player's throw of the dice results in a "mixed" roll such as 3-5 or 6-1, then he moves one of his men the number of steps indicated by one of the dice, and another of his men (or the same man) the number of steps indicated by the other dice.

Note that a player must, if possible, play both parts of a roll. For example if he rolls a 6-1 and by moving a man 1 step he would leave himself unable to move any man 6 steps, then this play would be illegal if there was an alternative play in which he used both the 1 and the 6. And if it is impossible to use both parts of a roll a player must, if possible, use the higher part. So if rolling a 6-1 gives the player a choice of only moving a man 6 steps and only moving a man 1 step, he must choose a play which moves a man 6 steps.

If a player's throw of the dice results in a "double", such as 2-2 or 5-5, he must (if possible) make four moves of the indicated number of steps. For example, if he rolls a 2-2 a player may move four different men two steps each, or he may move one man two steps and then another two steps and another and another, or he may choose some combination such as moving one man two steps, and another man two steps on three successive hops.

## Hitting an Enemy Man or Blot

Each triangle on the Backgammon board is called a "point". If a point is occupied by one enemy man, then that enemy man is called a blot and is vulnerable. If one of your own men lands on it after making a move, then the enemy blot is removed from that point and placed on the bar. This process is called "hitting a blot".

If a player has two or more men on a point, then he is said to have "made" that point, and his opponent's men may not land on a point which has been made. For this reason it is a good idea to try to "make" a number of points that are adjacent to each other on the board, since this will impede the progress of your opponent's men around the board.

## Re-entering the Board from the Bar

If a player has one or more of his own men on the bar, he may not make any other type of move until he has re-entered all of his men from the bar. A man on the bar can only re-enter the game if its owner throws a number on the dice which corresponds to the number of a point in his opponent's inner board which is:

- vacant *or*
- occupied by one or more of his own men *or*
- occupied by only one of his opponent's men (a blot).

In any of the above three cases the man on the bar re-enters the game on that point, and if in the process it has hit an enemy blot then the enemy blot is sent to the bar.

Having used part of a dice roll to re-enter a man from the bar, a player may then use the other dice score to re-enter another man or, if that is not necessary, to continue with the game.

If a player rolls a double while he has one or more men on the bar, he uses all four parts of the roll in the usual way, provided of course that he first re-enters any men still on the bar.

## Bearing off Men

Once a player has succeeded in bringing all of his men into his own inner table, he bears them off the board by removing them from points that correspond to the scores he rolls on the dice. For example, if he rolls a 6-3 when he has a man on his 6 point but no man on his 3 point, he can bear off the man on the 6 point but must then use the 3 to move another man 3 steps.

If he prefers, a player may use part or all of his roll to move men in the board rather than bear men off.

If a number on the dice is greater than that of the highest point occupied, it is used to bear men off from that point. For example, if you have a man on your 4 point but none on your 5 or 6 point, you use a 5 to bear off from the 4 point.

If a player's blot is hit after he has started bearing off, he must re-enter from the bar and reach his own inner table again before continuing to bear off.

## Winning the Game

The game is won by a player who bears off all his own men or when a player's opponent decides to resign (which may happen when the winning player decides to double).



## The Doubling Cube

Backgammon is often played for stakes (or matches if you prefer), and the game is made more exciting by the use of the doubling cube. The stakes may be doubled and redoubled and redoubled again during the course of a game, and the cube is used to indicate how many times the original stake is currently at risk. The cube's faces normally show the numbers 2, 4, 8, 16, 32 and 64.

At the start of a game the stake is 1 unit and the cube is normally placed in the centre of the bar with 64 face upwards. Either player may make the first double of the game, by waiting until it is his turn to roll the dice, and then before rolling he takes the cube, turns the 2 face upwards, and puts the cube on his opponent's side of the board. His opponent must then:

- Accept the double, and play for twice the stakes (2 units) *or*
- Decline the double and resign the game (losing 1 unit).

A player who accepts a double is then the only one who has the right to make the next double of the game.

## Scoring

The number of points scored when a player wins a game depends partly on how much progress his opponent has made and partly on the status of the doubling cube:

- If the loser has managed to bear off at least one man then the winner's basic score is 1 point.
- If the loser has not managed to bear off any men but does not have any of his men in the winner's inner table or on the bar, then the winner's basic score is 2 points. This situation is called a "gammon".
- If the loser has not managed to bear off any men and also has at least one man on the bar or in the winner's inner table, then the winner has made a "backgammon" and his basic score is 3 points.

The winner's basic score is then multiplied by the status of the doubling cube to obtain the actual number of points scored.

## Opening Moves

Having an opening move can be an advantage; knowing how to play it can be crucial. You might think that there should be a standard best opening move for any throw of the dice. But for many throws there just isn't a clearcut standard, any more than there is a standard first move at chess.

## Recommended Opening Moves

The moves below assume that you are playing White.



Move one back man from black one point to black twelve point.



Move a back man from black one point to black eleven point.



Move one man from black one point to black bar point, and one from black twelve point to your own ten point.



Move a back man from black one point to black bar point, and a man from black twelve point to your eleven point.



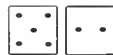
Make your bar point (move one man from black twelve point and one from your eight point to your seven point).



Move two white men from black twelve point to your eight and nine points.



Make your three point (move one man from your eight point and one from your six point to your three point).



Move two men from black twelve point to your eight and eleven points.



Move one man from black twelve point to your eight point, and one back man from black one to black two point.



Move two men from black twelve point to your nine and ten points.



Make your four point (move one man from your eight point and one from your six point to your four point).



Move one man from black twelve point to your nine point, and one back man from black one to black two point.



Move two men from black twelve point to your ten and eleven points.

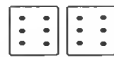


Make your five point (move one man from your eight point and one man from your six point to your five point).

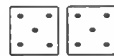


Move one man from black twelve point to your eleven point, and one back man from black one to black two point.

## Opening Moves for Doubles



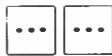
Make both bar points (i.e. move two men from black one point to black bar point and two men from black twelve point to your bar point).



Move two men from black twelve point to your three point.



Move your two back men from black one point to black five point, and two men from black twelve to your own nine point.



Make your own five and three points (move two men from your eight point to your five point, and two men from your six point to your three point).



Make your eleven and four points (move two men from black twelve point to your eleven point, and two men from your six point to your four point).

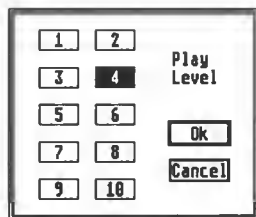


Make your bar and five points (move two men from your eight point to your bar point, and two men from your six point to your five point).

## Using the Program

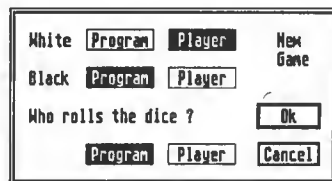
Note that throughout this manual we refer to the two players as Black and White. If you are using a colour monitor or television, the game pieces will be coloured White and Red.

Once Backgammon has loaded the program automatically displays the dialog shown below.



This allows you to select the starting skill level. Backgammon has ten different skill levels. The first two are very easy to play and are there to encourage beginners. The program will always start on level three after loading.

Once you have selected the starting level, the program will display a second dialog allowing you to choose which colour pieces you play with and which are used by the computer or a second player.



Select the appropriate options by clicking on either the Program or Player buttons.

The dialog also allows you to dictate who throws the dice. If you click on Program, the computer will randomly generate two numbers representing the throw of two dice. You can alternatively use real dice and enter the numbers thrown when prompted.

When you are happy with the selections you have made, click on the OK button. You will now be playing in one of four modes:

- Program playing White, you playing Black
- Program playing Black, you playing White
- Program playing both Black and White
- You and a second player playing both colours

In the first two modes you will be playing against the computer. In the third the program will play against itself and in the last mode you can make the moves for both sides, so you can play against a friend using the computer as your board and referee.

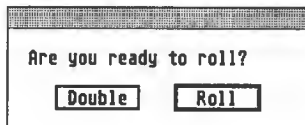
On the right-hand side of the screen the computer will now display details of who is playing Black and who is playing White; the word Atari is used to show which colour or colours are being played by the computer. The program also indicates who has the current move.

## Self Play Mode

If you have chosen to allow the program to play with both the black and white pieces it will start to play against itself. When it finishes one game it will wait for a few seconds, set up the initial position and then start another game. In order to exit from this mode, move the mouse pointer to the *Game* menu between moves and select the *New* option. This will present the opening dialog shown on page 17, allowing you to re-assign the pieces.

## The Doubling Cube

When it is your turn to move, the program presents the following dialog:



If you want to double the stakes, and are allowed to (i.e. the cube is on your side of the board), simply click on the *Double* option. If the program accepts your double, the cube will double in value and will move to the opposite side of the board, indicating that the program has the right to double next.

If the program decides that it wishes to double, it will display a dialog allowing you to accept the double or resign from the game. Click on the *Resign* or *Double* button to inform the computer of your choice.

Once the Doubling Cube has reached 64, subsequent doubles are represented by the cube displaying the letters A to J. These correspond to:

| Letter | Value |
|--------|-------|
| A      | 128   |
| B      | 256   |
| C      | 512   |
| D      | 1024  |
| E      | 2048  |
| F      | 4096  |
| G      | 8192  |
| H      | 16384 |
| I      | 32768 |
| J      | 65536 |

## Making Moves

Throughout this section we will assume that the program is rolling the dice. There is a separate section on what happens if you are rolling the dice (see page 23).

When the dialog on page 22 is displayed and you are ready for the dice to be rolled, click on the *Roll* button. The dice roll will appear on the right hand side of the board and you are now ready to make the first part of your move.

To move one of your pieces, position the cursor on the point where that piece is standing and press down the left-hand mouse button to pick up the piece. While the mouse button is being held down move the mouse to drag the piece to its new position, then release the mouse button. Provided that your move is legal the piece will remain on its new point. If the total number of pieces on that point is now more than five, this total will be shown on one of the five men displayed on that point.

## Entering Dice Rolls

If you have chosen to use real dice rather than let the program simulate a dice throw, you will see the following dialog displayed before each move.



When this appears throw the two dice and enter the numbers next to the *Dice 1:* and *Dice 2:* prompts; then click on the OK button to instruct the program to use your throw. If the numbers provided by you are illegal (for example greater than 6) the computer will not accept your entry until the offending number is re-entered.

## The Program Menus

### The Desk Menu

#### Desk

About Backgammon

Clicking on the *About Backgammon* entry displays a dialog containing program copyright information. Desk accessories are not supported while Backgammon is running and are disabled until an exit is made from the game.

## The Game Menu

#### Game

New... ^N

Open... ^O

Save... ^S

Print ^P

Restart ^R

Quit ^Q

The Game menu contains several options that relate to loading and saving games, and printing out a record of all games played so far.

### New

Clicking on *New* or using the <Control N> keyboard shortcut halts the game currently being played and invokes the new game dialog shown on page 17. Clicking on OK starts a new game using the current settings.



## Open

This menu option allows you to load in a game that has previously been saved using Backgammon's *Save* option. Once loaded, you can resume playing if it was an unfinished game, or use *Move Back* and *Restore Move* to study the course of the game.

To load a saved game from disk click on the *Open* menu entry or use the <Control O> keyboard shortcut. This will display the standard GEM file selector. Now type in the filename of the saved game that you wish to load, and click on the OK button. The game will load and, if it was an unfinished game, play will commence from the point at which the game was saved.

## Save

The *Save* menu option allows you to store the current game to disk. To save the game, click on the *Save* entry in the Game menu or use the <Control S> keyboard shortcut. Once the standard GEM file selector appears type in the name of the file into which you want to save the current game. This name may be up to 8 alphanumeric characters in length, so if your name is Adam and this is the sixth game which you want to save to disk, you might want to give the file the name ADAM6. When you have typed in the filename, simply press the <Return> key or click on the OK button to save the game to disk.

## Print

Backgammon automatically keeps a record of all games played by you against the computer. Just in case you feel inclined to cheat, any games in which you have swapped sides, used the *Prepare* option or changed levels are automatically excluded from this log. Clicking on *Print* displays a log of each of the games played so far, along with details of the winner, the number of points scored and the final value of the doubling cube. Click the left-hand mouse button to return to game screen.

## Restart

*Restart* can be used to start a game from any point after the *Take Back* option has been used.

The *Restart* menu option will remain disabled until *Take Back* is used to step backwards through the moves made so far in the current game. Selecting *Restart* from the Game menu or using the <Control R> keyboard shortcut will restart the game from the position to which you have stepped back.

## Quit

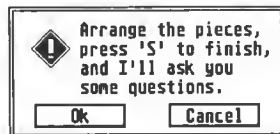
*Quit* can be used at any point within a game to leave the Backgammon program and return to the GEM Desktop. Clicking on *Quit* or using the <Control Q> keyboard shortcut invokes a dialog box containing three buttons. Clicking on the *Quit* button will leave the program without saving the game first, choosing *Save* brings up the GEM file selector, allowing you to save the current game first before quitting, and selecting *Cancel* returns you to the current game and allows play to continue.

## The Options Menu

This menu contains several options used either to prepare the game prior to playing or to examine the moves made during the course of a game.

### Prepare

*Prepare* allows you to set up any Backgammon position, for example from a magazine article or a book. Clicking on *Prepare* or pressing the <Alternate P> keyboard shortcut displays the dialog shown below, warning you that you are about to enter Set-up mode. Click on OK to prepare the board or click on Cancel to return to the game.



After clicking on OK the dialog will disappear and pieces may be rearranged around the board by dragging them to their new positions on the board or the bar.

Once all of the pieces have been positioned correctly, press the S key. This will display the following dialog, allowing you to set up other elements of the game.

Prepare Game

White Program Player

Black Program Player

Who rolls the dice? Program Player

Whose turn to move? White

The Doubling Cube

Value? 4

Where? White Black

Ok Cancel

The top half of this dialog is used in exactly the same way as the New Game dialog described on page 17. The top four rows of buttons are used to select who plays Black, who plays White, whether you or the computer throws the dice and who takes the first throw.

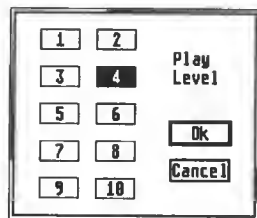
The box headed *The Doubling Cube* is used to set the initial value and position of the doubling cube. If neither the Black or White buttons are selected, the doubling cube will have a starting value of 1 and will be available to either player.

Clicking on either the Black or White button initially places the doubling cube on that player's half of the board. If one or other button is selected, the starting value of the doubling cube can be set by clicking on either arrow or by typing in the desired value up to a maximum of 65536. Clicking on a button a second time will deselect that button, returning the doubling cube to the centre of the board.

Once your setup is correct, click on OK to start play, or Cancel to return to the current game without adopting the revised board and settings.

## Change Level

Backgammon has ten different skill levels. The first two levels are very easy to play against and are there to encourage beginners. The program will always start on level three after loading. Clicking on *Change Level* or using the <Alternate C> keyboard shortcut will display the following dialog with the current level being shown in black.



To change level, click on the button displaying the level that you wish to select and then click on the OK button. Selecting Cancel will return to the game at the current level.

## Swap Players

Clicking on this menu item or using the <Alternate S> keyboard shortcut swaps over players. The player previously playing Black will take control of the White pieces and vice versa. (Any game during which this option is used will not be recorded in the game log produced using *Print*).

## Action Replay

*Action Replay* will play through each move made in the current game starting with the first and finishing with the most recent. Clicking on *Action Replay* or using the <Alternate A> keyboard shortcut will produce the following display:



The speed at which each move is replayed is set by clicking on either the *Slow*, *Medium*, or *Fast* buttons. The replay starts as soon as you click on OK or press the <Return> key.

## Move Back

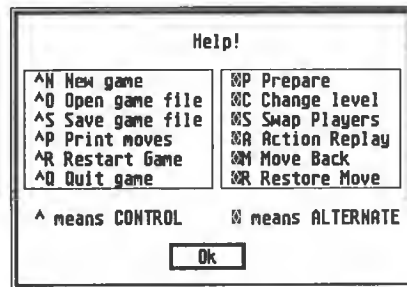
Whenever it is your turn to move, you may step back through each move made as far as you wish, even to the start of the game. Select *Move Back* or press the <Alternate M> keyboard shortcut to step back one move. To restart a game after having used *Take Back*, use the *Restart* menu option described on page 28.

## Restore Move

This steps forwards through a game after the *Move Back* option has been used. Selecting *Restore Move* or pressing the <Alternate F> keyboard shortcut will advance the game by one move from the current position. *Restore Move* can be used as many times as you wish up to the point in the game where you started moving back.

## Keyboard Shortcuts

Each of the Backgammon menu items can be chosen either by using the mouse to select the required option, or through the use of *Keyboard Shortcuts*. Each of these shortcuts is shown next to the menu entry. Pressing either the *Alternate* or *Control* key simultaneously with the letter key shown will have an identical effect to clicking on the menu entry. Pressing the *Help* key displays the dialog shown below summarising the keyboard shortcuts.





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